

BANBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Banbury Town Council held on Tuesday, 05 November 2024 at 6.30pm at the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillors Cherry (Town Mayor) and Mallon (Deputy Town Mayor).
Councillors: Beere, Biegel, Brant, Clarke, Crichton, Dhesi, Eaton, Elugwu, Hodgson, Hussain, Mears, Okeke, Richards, Strangwood, Thornhill, Tohill-Martin, Urwick, Vaitkus and Woodward.

Officers: Mark Hassall (Town Clerk & RFO).
Paul Almond (Director of Environment and Deputy Clerk).
James Smith (Media & Communications Officer).

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Harwood.

C.40/24 Declarations of Interest

None.

C.41/24 Minutes of the Last Meeting

IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 September 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

C.42/24 Communications

The Town Mayor's communications had been circulated to those present.

IT WAS RESOLVED that the Communications be noted.

C.43/24 Questions – Elected Members and Members of the Public

There were no questions from Elected Members or members of the public.

C.44/24 Planning Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Beere, seconded by Councillor Thornhill, and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on the 23 October 2024, be received.

C.45/24 General Services Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Richards, seconded by Councillor Hodgson, and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the General Services Committee meeting held on 08 October 2024, be received.

C.46/24 Resources Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Hussain, seconded by Councillor Biegel, and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 22 October 2024, be received.

It was further **RESOLVED** that:

- (1) the Internal Controls Programme (referred to in Minute R.19/24 and appended at Appendix A to the Resources Committee Minutes), be adopted, without any changes;
- (2) the Risk Management Policy (referred to in Minute R.20/24 and appended at Appendix B to the Resources Committee Minutes), be adopted, without any changes; and
- (3) the Treasury Management Policy (referred to in Minute R.21/24 and appended at Appendix C to the Resources Committee Minutes), be adopted, without any changes.

C.47/24 Internal Audit Report 2024-25 (First Interim)

Members were invited to review the first interim report of the internal auditor. After a full discussion it was proposed by Councillor Hussain, seconded by Councillor Eaton, and **RESOLVED** to receive and note the Internal Audit report, as set out in **Appendix A** to the Minutes.

C.48/24 Resolutions Moved on Notice - Resolution No 68

It was moved by Councillor Brant, seconded by Councillor Clarke, that:

“Banbury is a vibrant town rich in cultural diversity. To foster community spirit and promote understanding among residents, it is essential to organise public events that reflect and celebrate this diversity. Such initiatives can enhance social cohesion and provide a platform for all cultures within our community.

It was proposed that Banbury Town Council:

- Form a new forum dedicated to planning and organising events that celebrate the diverse cultures of Banbury. This committee will include representatives from various cultural community groups within the town.*
- Undertake a thorough assessment of the current events programme to identify gaps in representation.*
- Collaborate with local cultural organisations and community groups to review events to ensure they are inclusive and representative of the town's diversity (e.g. Black History Month, LGBTQ+ Pride Month, Ramadan)*
- Establish a system for community feedback to continuously improve and adapt events to better serve the interests and needs of all residents.*

By committing to these initiatives, the Town Council will actively promote inclusivity and appreciation for the rich tapestry of cultures that make up Banbury. This motion seeks to enhance community engagement, foster mutual respect, and create a welcoming environment for all residents. We urge all council members to support this motion and work collaboratively towards a more inclusive and vibrant Banbury events programme.”

After a lengthy debate an amendment to the motion was proposed by Councillor Hussain, seconded by Councillor Eaton, to the effect that Banbury Town Council's Resources Committee, in conjunction with its Events Working Group, consider the above-mentioned proposals. The amendment was agreed and the substantive motion subsequently **RESOLVED** unanimously.

The Meeting ended at 7.00pm.



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Banbury Town Council

Internal Audit Report 2024-25 (First Interim)

Adrian Shepherd-Roberts

*For and on behalf of
Auditing Solutions Ltd*

Background

Statute requires all town and parish councils to arrange for an independent internal audit examination of their accounting records and system of internal control and for the conclusions to be reported each year in the AGAR.

This report sets out the work undertaken in relation to the 2024-25 financial year to date which was completed on 11th October 2024. We have undertaken our initial review for the year and we wish to thank the Town Clerk/RFO in assisting the process, providing all necessary documentation in electronic format to facilitate completion of our review for the year to date. We have ensured that governance and financial controls remain effective.

Internal Audit Approach

In completing our review for the year to date, we have had regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential mis recording or misrepresentation in the year-end Statement of Accounts / Annual Return. Our programme of cover is designed to afford appropriate assurance that the Council's financial systems are robust and operate in a manner to ensure effective probity of transactions and to afford a reasonable probability of identifying any material errors or possible abuse of the Council's own and the national statutory regulatory framework. The programme is also designed to facilitate our completion of the 'Internal Audit Report' in the Council's Annual Return, which requires independent assurance over a series of internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

We have concluded that, on the basis of the programme of work we have undertaken, the Council has maintained adequate and effective internal control arrangements during the year.

We ask that members consider the content of this report and acknowledge that the report has been reviewed by Council.

Detailed Report

Maintenance of Accounting Records & Bank Reconciliations

The Council uses the Omega software to maintain its accounting records. Three bank accounts are operated with NatWest (Disbursements; Salaries and Special Interest) with transactions on each recorded in separate cashbooks in Omega. Further surplus funds are deposited with Santander and Barclays in a selection of term deposit accounts.

Our objective here is to ensure that the accounting records are being maintained accurately and currently and that no anomalous entries appear in cashbooks or financial ledgers. We have consequently: -

- Verified the accurate carry forward of the prior year's closing Trial Balance detail in the financial software into the accounts for 2024-25 by reference to the 2023-24 closing Trial Balance;
- Ensured that the financial ledger remains "in balance" for the year to date;
- Ensured that an appropriate cost centre and nominal ledger income and expenditure coding structure is in place;
- Checked and agreed a sample of transactions on the Salaries and Special Interest accounts for the year to September 2024;
- Checked and agreed detail on the latest disbursement account reconciliations as at September 2024; and
- Checked and agreed detail of the other two account reconciliations as at 30th September 2024.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no significant issues have been identified in this area. We will undertake further work at our next review.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective here is to ensure that the Council has developed an appropriate approach to the management of corporate governance; that Council and Committee meetings are conducted in accordance with the adopted Standing Orders and that, as far as we are able to ascertain, no actions of a potentially unlawful nature have been or are being considered for implementation.

We have commenced our review of the Council's minutes, examining those for the Full Council and its Standing Committee meetings (excluding Planning) for the year to determine, as far as we may reasonably be expected, whether any issues exist that may have an adverse effect on the Council's financial or other operational stability in the short, medium or long term.

We note that the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations were adopted in June 2024. NALC have issued a new model of the Financial Regulations dated April 2024. Council

may wish to review their approved Financial Regulations and a copy of the new model document has been provided to the Clerk to assist with this consideration.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area, warranting further comment. As noted above Council may wish to review the current Financial Regulations to the new model Regulations. We will undertake further work at our update review.

Review of Expenditure

Our aim here is to ensure that: -

- Council resources are released in accordance with the Council's approved procedures and budgets;
- Payments are supported by appropriate documentation, either in the form of an original trade invoice or other appropriate form of document confirming the payment as due and/or an acknowledgement of receipt, where no other form of invoice is available;
- An official ordering process is in place and operated for all appropriate purchases, acknowledging that a range of goods and services are provided under contractual requirements (e.g. Grass Cutting) or legislation (e.g. non-domestic rates);
- The correct expense codes have been applied to invoices when processed; and
- VAT has been appropriately identified and coded to the control account for periodic recovery.

To ensure compliance with the above criteria, we have examined a sample of payments processed in the financial year to date.

Finally, in this area, we have examined the content of the quarterly VAT reclaims to September 2024 which has yet to be reimbursed by HMRC.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no significant issues have been identified in this area. We will undertake further work at our next review.

Assessment and Management of Risk

Our aim here is to ensure that the Council has put in place appropriate arrangements to identify all potential areas of risk of both a financial and health and safety nature, whilst also ensuring that appropriate arrangements exist to monitor and manage those risks to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition.

A Financial and Risk Management Policies are in place, which was approved respectively by Council at its October 2023 meeting and will be reviewed again in this financial year

The Council's insurance is provided by Aviva: we have reviewed the current year's schedule noting that Employers and Public Liability cover are in place at £10 million and £15million respectively, together with Fidelity Guarantee/Internal crime cover of £5 million and Business Interruption together cover on the Council premises and contents cover, all of which we consider appropriate for the Council's present requirements.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area warranting further comment.

Precept Determination and Budgetary Control

We aim in this area of our work to ensure that the Council has appropriate procedures in place to determine its future financial requirements leading to the adoption of an approved budget and formal determination of the amount of the precept placed on the Unitary Authority, that effective arrangements are in place to monitor budgetary performance throughout the financial year and that the Council has identified and retains appropriate reserve funds to meet future spending plans.

The Council will commence consideration of the 2025-26 budgetary requirements later this year and we shall consider the action taken and outcomes, together with the approved level of precept at a future visit.

We are pleased to note that members continue to receive regular budget monitoring reports with over/under-spends and the level of earmarked reserves the subject of regular review.

Conclusions

We have been advised that the Council are to formally consider and finalise its budget and precept requirements for 2025-26 later in the financial year. Consequently, we shall review this area further at our final visit, also examining the year's budget outturn, following up any significant variances and obtaining appropriate explanations: we shall also consider the appropriateness of retained reserves to meet the Council's ongoing revenue spending requirements and any development aspirations.

Review of Income

The Council receives income from a variety of sources in addition to the annual precept, including monies received from burial and associated fees, allotment and premises rents, Town Hall room hire, special events, grants and donations and bank interest.

- We note that members continue to review annually the scale of fees and charges for the various amenities, with appropriate revisions approved for the current financial year;

We have not undertaken work at our first interim visit and will specifically examine management controls and income arising from Allotments and the Cemeteries for 2023-24 at our interim update review.

We have reviewed the Sales Ledger, as it stands currently, and are pleased to report that no significant or long-standing debts are in existence of which the Council are not aware.

Conclusions

We will undertake a review of specified areas at our next audit.

Petty Cash Account

Our aim in this area is to ensure that appropriate controls are in place; that all expenditure incurred is adequately supported by trade invoices or till receipts; that the expenditure is appropriate for the Council's requirements; that VAT has been separately identified for periodic recovery and that cheque encashments from the main cashbooks are properly recorded.

We have not physically checked the cash but have reviewed the holding from the information that we have been provided.

Conclusions

There are no matters requiring formal comment or recommendation in this area of our review process.

Review of Staff Salaries

The Council employs a number of staff preparing the monthly payroll in-house using the Sage payroll software. In examining the Council's payroll function, we aim to confirm that extant legislation is being appropriately observed as regards adherence to the Employee Rights Act 1998 and the requirements of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) legislation as regards the deduction and payment over of income tax and NI contributions, together with meeting the requirements of the local government pension scheme, as most recently updated from April 2023 as regards employee contribution bandings.

To meet these objectives, we have, by reference to the payroll run for September 2024: -

- Ensured that the Council reviews and approves pay scales for staff annually;
- Examined a sample of employment contracts ensuring that gross pay is in accordance with that detail or, where superseded by a subsequent letter confirming a change in employment terms, in line with that letter;
- Checked the tax and NI deductions being applied in September 2024 to the relevant HMRC tables;
- Similarly, ensured that the appropriate pension percentage contribution is being applied to those employees contributing the LGPS scheme; and
- Agreed the gross amounts paid to all individuals in September 2023 by reference to the supporting payslips.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that no issues have been identified in this area.

Investments and Loans

Our objectives here are to ensure that the Council is investing “surplus funds”, be they held temporarily or on a longer term basis, in appropriate banking and investment institutions, that an appropriate investment policy is in place, that the Council is obtaining the best rate of return on any such investments made, that interest earned is brought to account correctly and appropriately in the accounting records and that any loan repayments due to or payable by the Council are transacted in accordance with the relevant loan agreements.

We are pleased to note that the Council has an appropriate Treasury Management Policy which was reviewed by the Council in September 2023.

The Council currently has £3.9 million held on deposit with Santander bank: we have verified the holding by reference to current statements held. We have also checked the posting of interest in the nominal ledger.

There are no loans outstanding currently repayable either by or to the Council.

Conclusions

No issues require formal comment or recommendation. We will undertake further work at future reviews.